



Dispositional antecedents and outcomes of political skill in organizations: A four-study investigation with convergence

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Abstract

We developed a four-study research plan to examine the dispositional antecedents of political skill and its job performance consequences, and also to incorporate the mediating role of reputation, drawing upon a recent theoretical model of political skill in organizations. Study 1 established the psychometric properties of the two reputation scales used in the present research, and also demonstrated the validity of the self-report reputation measure in Study 4. Study 2 tested, and demonstrated support for, the ‘Affability’ dispositional theme as a predictor of political skill, and political skill as predictor of job performance. In Study 3, the political skill–job performance linkage was replicated, but when reputation was investigated as an intermediate linkage, it was found to fully mediate the relationship between political skill and job performance. Study 4 investigated all the linkages examined in Studies 2 and 3, and found that the ‘Active Influence’ dispositional theme predicted political skill, and that the political skill–job performance relationship was fully mediated by reputation. Collectively, these studies demonstrated support for recent theoretical developments in political skill and reputation, suggesting that political skill has dispositional antecedents, and that political skill demonstrates a significant impact on job performance, through reputation. The strengths and limitations of this research are discussed, and directions for future research are provided.

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1. Introduction

The political perspective on organizations suggests that as political arenas, organizations require that individuals possess both political will and political skill to be successful, and indeed, to even survive in such contexts (Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981). Although politics in organizations has been an active area of scientific investigation for decades, it has been only recently that scholars have begun systematic study of political skill (e.g., Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005; Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005). However, although some research has been conducted recently, lacking has been an examination of the antecedents of political skill in organizations, as well as the mechanisms through which it influences outcomes identified by previous research.

The purposes of the present research are to investigate the dispositional antecedents of political skill in organizations, and to extend previous research on the job performance consequences of political skill by examining the important mediating role of reputation. Four studies were conducted, each of which focuses on part or all of the above-mentioned research purposes, and seeks convergence across the proposed linkages. We propose that personality constructs, reflective of particular dispositional themes, serve as antecedents of political skill, and that political skill predicts job performance through its effects on reputation, thus testing key linkages proposed in recent conceptualizations of political skill (Ferris et al., *in press*) and reputation (Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2003; Zinko, Ferris, Blass, & Laird, 2007) in organizations.

2. Conceptualization of political skill and hypothesis development

2.1. *Nature of political skill*

Ferris et al. (2005) defined political skill as “the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives” (p. 127). As such, politically skilled individuals combine a keen understanding of social situations with the capacity to situationally adjust their behavior to meet changing needs and demands in a manner that inspires trust and confidence, and allows for the effective influence and control over others.

Politically skilled individuals exude a sense of calm self-confidence and personal security that attracts others and instills in them feelings of comfort. Their focus is outward toward others, yet balanced, which allows them to maintain proper perspective, and also to monitor and gauge their accountability to both self and others. Furthermore, politically skilled individuals not only know precisely what to do in different social situations at work, but also how to do it in a manner that disguises any self-serving motives, and is interpreted as genuine and sincere (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005).

2.2. Theoretical framework of political skill in organizations

2.2.1. Overview

Ferris et al. (in press) developed a conceptualization of political skill that illustrates its antecedents and consequences, which serves as the conceptual foundation of the relationships among variables we test in the studies reported in this paper. They argued that, as a cognitive-affective-behavioral configuration of social competencies, political skill incorporates intra-psychic, interpersonal, and group-level processes, which help explain how the construct materializes and demonstrates influence in work settings. Furthermore, Ferris et al. suggested that political skill has dispositional antecedents reflected in specific dispositional themes, which might be represented operationally in particular personality constructs.

Furthermore, Ferris et al. (in press) contended that politically skilled individuals inspire greater trust and confidence in others, through their influential, situationally appropriate behavior, and thus transmit signals of effectiveness to others, all of which result in higher assessments of reputation and evaluations of job performance. Additionally, recent conceptual work has discussed the importance of reputation in organizations, and the role of political skill as an antecedent (Ferris et al., 2003; Zinko et al., 2007). Borrowing from these two conceptualizations, we formulate and test the linkages among personality, political skill, reputation, and job performance.

2.2.2. Dispositional antecedents of political skill

Whereas political skill has been viewed as a construct that can be substantially shaped or developed through training, socialization, and mentoring (Ferris et al., 2005), it is believed to have dispositional antecedents. Ferris et al. (in press) suggested that personality traits serve as dispositional antecedent themes of political skill, drawing conceptually from the theoretical “systems framework” of personality proposed by Mayer (2005). Of greatest relevance for the role played by political skill is the Social Actor subsystem, which, as Mayer (2005, p. 299) argued, “represents the expression of personality in a socially adaptive fashion. It includes social skills, role knowledge, and emotionally preferred expressions.”

The Social Actor subsystem seems to provide some initial inputs into the dispositional themes that might serve as antecedents of the social actor-oriented political skill construct, whereby central traits in the Social Actor subsystem were believed to be extraversion and self-monitoring. Extraversion reflects a sociability or affability theme, and self-monitoring appears to be representative of a perceptiveness theme. As a function of the definition and characterization of the political skill construct (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005), both control and action-oriented dispositional themes can be appropriately added to the conceptual scheme.

The conceptualization presented by Ferris et al. (in press) illustrates the characteristic themes reflected by specific dispositional constructs, and the manner in which they impact on political skill. Perceptiveness, Control, Affability, and Active Influence are the dispositional themes believed to serve as antecedents of political skill, and there are examples of specific constructs under each of these themes. Perceptiveness suggests the capacity to read and understand social situations, and it tends to be most representatively reflected in the self-monitoring construct (Snyder, 1987). The Control dispositional theme is concerned with the extent to which individuals perceive control over themselves and/or their environments, and it is best operationalized through the locus of control and self-efficacy constructs.

The other two dispositional themes proposed by Ferris et al. (in press) are Affability and Active Influence, and they are the two themes that are investigated in the present research with respect to the prediction, or antecedent conditions, of political skill. The Affability dispositional theme reflects a likeable, outgoing, and interpersonally pleasing orientation, and it is represented by such constructs as extraversion. The Active Influence dispositional perspective suggests constructs that convey a particularly strong action–orientation, such as proactive personality, which reflects a personal disposition toward proactive behavior, or the extent to which individuals take action to influence their environments (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Crant (1995, p. 532) suggested that “proactive personalities identify opportunities and act on them; they show initiative, take action, and persevere until they bring about meaningful change,” and those individuals are not much affected by situational forces.

Political skill is an interpersonal style construct that involves Perceptiveness, Control, Affability, and Active Influence, which position people to exercise personal influence and behave appropriately in social situations, and thus contribute to effectiveness in interpersonal interactions at work. As such, the personality antecedents reflective of the four themes proposed by Ferris et al. (in press) should serve as antecedents or predictors of political skill. Some empirical evidence exists to link political skill with dispositions. A positive relationship has been found between conscientiousness and political skill (Ferris et al., 2005), and proactive personality has been associated with network building, which is a feature of political skill (Thompson, 2005). In addition, significant positive correlations between positive affectivity and political skill have been reported in two studies (Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2004). Collectively, this work suggests that personality traits determine, to some degree, the extent to which individuals are politically skilled. Therefore, we formulate the first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Personality traits of extraversion (i.e., reflective of the Affability dispositional theme) and proactive personality (i.e., reflective of the Active Influence dispositional theme) will positively predict political skill.

2.2.3. Job performance consequences of political skill

Political skill has been proposed (Ferris et al., in press) and found to contribute to job performance ratings. For example, Ferris et al. (2005) found that political skill predicted job performance ratings among a sample of branch managers working in a financial services firm, and Semadar, Robins, and Ferris (2006) demonstrated that political skill emerged as the strongest predictor of managerial job performance among managers working in a motor-manufacturing company.

We argue that the positive effect of political skill on job performance can be explained by both actual performance gains, and by higher performance ratings resulting from interpersonal influence processes. First, performing in organizations requires access to critical information and scarce resources. Politically skilled individuals are at a vantage point in obtaining such information and resources because they spend considerable time at work networking with others, and are well connected with people significant to their work life (Ferris et al., 2005, in press). Through active networking activities, and via their ability to be convincing and persuasive, politically skilled individuals are more likely than others to secure things needed for the job.

Meanwhile, politically skilled individuals are socially astute, and know the precise way to situationally adapt and adjust their behavior in order to be interpersonally appropriate and

effective (e.g., Ferris et al., *in press*). Such positioning, savvy, capacity to influence others, and genuineness, reflective of politically skilled individuals, also contribute to higher performance ratings. Performance ratings have been shown to be influenced by factors other than objective performance, such as affect or liking (e.g., Cardy & Dobbins, 1986).

Because of the partially subjective nature of performance evaluation, and the skills politically skilled individuals possess in exerting interpersonal influence for personal goals, it is likely that they will make use of their skills to enhance their performance evaluation, which is critical to many job- and career-related goals, such as salary increases and promotions. Therefore, as a replication and extension of previous research results regarding the relationship between political skill and job performance ratings, and following the theoretical linkages proposed by Ferris et al. (*in press*), we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. Political skill positively predicts job performance ratings.

To date, there has not been much investigation of potential mediators of the political skill–job performance relationship (For a recent exception, see Gentry, Leslie, Ohlott, Tavares, & Cartner, 2006). In the current research, we examine reputation as such a mediator, as has been modeled in theoretical frameworks on political skill (Ferris et al., *in press*) and personal reputation (Ferris et al., 2003; Zinko et al., 2007). We argue that the influence of political skill on job performance is primarily realized in the social influence processes by which individuals exercise influence over their job performance ratings through their reputation development.

2.2.4. Reputation and its mediating role in the political skill–job performance relationship

Ferris et al. (2003) defined reputation as a “complex combination of salient personal characteristics and accomplishments, demonstrated behavior, and intended images presented over some period of time as observed directly and/or as reported from secondary sources” (p. 213). Individuals who have developed more favorable reputations are seen as more legitimate, competent, and trustworthy, and typically enjoy the benefits of being viewed as possessing a higher level of status and effectiveness (e.g., Bromley, 1993; Tsui, 1984). These perceptions allow for the accumulation of power, influence (Pfeffer, 1992), autonomy, and decision latitude (Ferris et al., 2003); that is, all factors that promote influence effectiveness.

Ferris et al. (*in press*) argued that politically skilled individuals inspire greater trust and confidence in others, through their influential, situationally appropriate behavior and genuineness, and thus transmit signals conducive to a favorable image to the public, which result in higher assessments of reputation. Individuals high in political skill are highly adaptive (Ferris et al., 2005, *in press*). Because of their social astuteness and ability to exert interpersonal influence with effective tactics, they know exactly what to do and how to do it so as to establish and maintain positive impressions. Furthermore, because of their networking ability, politically skilled individuals are able to build their social capital, with which their favorable reputation spreads effectively within the target persons or social groups. Therefore, politically skilled individuals are more likely than others to enjoy favorable personal reputation at work.

As to the impact of reputation, it appears that reputations not only can directly influence others' evaluations of individuals, but also can serve as perceptual backdrops against which interpersonal behavior at work is perceived and interpreted, thus affecting work outcomes such as job performance (e.g., Hochwarter, Ferris, Zinko, Arnell, & James, 2007b). Reputation effects on work outcomes manifest themselves for several reasons. First, the behaviors of

reputable individuals are more frequently attributed to altruistic motives (Johnson, Erez, Kiker, & Motowidlo, 2002). Thus, targets likely view the behavior of an individual with a favorable reputation as benefiting others, as well as the unit or organization as a whole, which is likely to result in higher than average performance ratings.

Second, reputation reduces uncertainty by serving an important “signaling” function. Signaling refers to actions by individuals that convey information about their intentions and abilities to others (Spence, 1974). Signaling serves to distinguish reputation in the eyes of observers, making reputation more salient by promoting attentional focus. Particularly in ambiguous situations, attention will be drawn to individuals who demonstrate behaviors that set them apart from others, leading to extreme evaluations (Taylor & Fiske, 1978).

In sum, politically skilled individuals are more likely than others to enjoy favorable reputations, and possessing a favorable reputation will allow individuals to be perceived positively when attempting to influence others. Therefore, this allows individuals to accumulate not only an even more favorable status, but also more latitude in using their influence, as when superiors are rating their job performance. As such, we suggest that politically skilled individuals might well have their job performance evaluated more highly through the reputations they enjoy. In the current research, we test the political skill–job performance relationship in three different contexts, and explore the mediating role of reputation in this relationship proposed by Ferris et al. (in press). In light of the above arguments, we formulate the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3. Reputation will fully mediate the relationship between political skill and job performance ratings.

2.3. Plan of the research

2.3.1. Construct validity study of reputation measures

Because the area of reputation in organizations is under developed, and a number of empirical studies have manipulated reputation in experimental contexts, there has been no generally accepted and validated measure developed to date. Therefore, the first study in the present research involves a study to establish validity evidence for the new reputation measures used here. Study 1 attempts to establish the psychometric properties of the two reputation scales used in this research, as well as to demonstrate the validity of self-report reputation measures. Because the two scales used in the present research are new scales, which have not yet had the opportunity to establish known psychometric properties, we felt it important to conduct a pilot study in order to establish evidence of both content and construct validity.

The use of self-reports of the reputation construct is appropriate for several reasons. First, Emler and Hopkins (1990) have argued persuasively that individuals gain knowledge and understanding of their own reputations by the way others behave toward them. In fact, it is clear that reputation is not developed, nor operates, in a vacuum, but rather represents information that is transmitted and shared within a social context (Emler, 1990). Thus, most individuals should be capable of providing reliable and valid assessments of their own reputations, which are reflective of the other assessments that become transmitted within the social context. However, because the two reputation measures used in the present research are new, Study 1 was conducted to provide psychometric evidence in

support of these scales, and demonstrate that self-reports and other-reports of reputation using these scales are correlated significantly.

Furthermore, although Hochwarter et al. (2007b) established a significant relationship between self-reports and other-reports of reputation, we felt it was necessary to establish similar validity evidence for the new reputation scales used in this research. The reputation construct is still so early in its development that replication of the Hochwarter et al. (2007b) findings with similar but different reputation scales will only serve to develop a more informed understanding of the reputation construct.

2.3.2. Three-study construct linkage testing package

The reputation construct validity investigation presented in Study 1 is followed by a three-study plan, created to examine the hypothesized relationships. Study 2 examines the ‘Affability’ dispositional theme (i.e., operationalized by the personality construct, extraversion) as a predictor of political skill, and then also investigates the consequences of political skill for job performance. In Study 3, the potential mediating role of reputation in the political skill–job performance relationship (i.e., political skill → reputation → job performance) is investigated. In Study 4, all the linkages in the model are investigated (i.e., personality → political skill → reputation → job performance), thereby seeking convergence for, and constructive replication of, the personality prediction of political skill (i.e., Hypothesis 1), the political skill prediction of job performance ratings (i.e., Hypothesis 2), and the mediating role of reputation in the political skill–job performance ratings relationship (i.e., Hypothesis 3) examined in the first two studies, using different measures of the focal constructs. The ‘Active Influence’ dispositional theme (i.e., operationalized by the personality construct, proactive personality) was used in this study as an antecedent of political skill.

The multi-study research plan attempts to incrementally establish support for the proposed relationships, as well as provide some convergence of results across studies. As such, we have the opportunity to examine whether some of these relationships are replicable findings. A number of scholars have advocated the use of replications as a means of demonstrating consistency of findings, which is not possible when results from a single-study design are presented. Furthermore, whereas “literal replications” are valuable, “constructive replications” make even stronger statements about the validity of the obtained findings because they replicate results while using different measures of the focal constructs, and different samples and settings (Lykken, 1968).

3. Study 1: Method

3.1. Sample and procedure

We pursued the above-mentioned objectives in a sample of undergraduate students of a large university in the southeastern United States. Fifty subjects were placed in previously established groups that had been formed at the beginning of the semester in order to perform classroom exercises. Subjects were then instructed to complete a team-building exercise. When the exercise had drawn to a close, subjects completed surveys regarding their own reputation as well as the reputations of those in their assigned groups. Therefore, each subject had both a self-report of his/her reputation in addition to two “other” reports rating the subject’s reputation.

3.2. Measures

All measures were collected for both “self” and “other,” and therefore were re-worded when appropriate. Possible responses ranged from *strongly disagree* = 1 to *strongly agree* = 7 for all scales.

3.2.1. Study 3 reputation scale

For the purpose of Study 3, a seven-item scale was created to measure reputation in the context of internship. The items were developed by the first author based on the conceptualization of reputation by Ferris et al. (2003), giving particular consideration as to what best represents reputation of an intern, given the relatively short duration of an internship program. A panel of three academic experts who have done research work on internships, and two professional experts who have rich experiences in coordinating or supervising college student internship programs then evaluated the items for construct validity. The panel members agreed that the items consistently and comprehensively reflected favorable impressions a supervisor would have formed of interns' based on their personal characteristics, behaviors, and potential achievements that are either directly or indirectly observable during an internship, thus establishing the face validity of the items. The wording of each of the items was carefully adjusted based on their comments to ensure clarity. Supervisors reported their perceived reputation of the interns. A sample item is “Most people in my unit trusted and respected him/her as a co-worker.”

3.2.2. Study 4 reputation scale

For Study 4, seven items from Remiraz (2004) were adapted to assess the focal person's self-evaluation of their own reputation at work. Only 7 out of the original 14 items were included in the survey due to constraints on length. Items were dropped if they concerned reputation related to a particular area, for example, efficiency or intelligence. The first author discussed the selection of items with Raul Remiraz, the author of the original scale, to ensure that the selected items well represent the intended domain of the construct. A sample item is “My colleagues respect my personal quality.”

3.2.3. Hochwarter et al. (2007b) reputation scale

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of Ferris et al. (2003), Hochwarter et al. (2007b) developed a 12-item measure of reputation. “I am regarded highly by others,” and “If people want things done right, they ask me to do it” represent scale items. Hochwarter et al. (2007b) reported reliabilities of the scale ranging from .86 to .94 across three different samples.

3.2.4. Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, and Vitale (2000) reputation scale

The items were adapted from a 3-item measure for store reputation by Jarvenpaa et al. (2000). The scale has been reported to hold adequate psychometric properties (Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, Saarinen, & Vitale, 1999; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000). Teltzrow, Meyer, and Lenz (2007) reported a reliability estimate of .85. For the purpose of the study, the word “store” in the original items was replaced with “this individual” to reflect personal reputation. Example items are, “This individual is well known,” and “This individual has a good reputation.”

4. Study 1: Results

The scale developed for Study 3 correlated significantly ($p < .001$) with the Hochwarter et al. (2007b) scale and with the Jarvenpaa et al. (2000) scale at $r = .87$ and $r = .71$, respectively. Furthermore, analysis showed the Study 3 scale to reflect a coefficient α internal consistency reliability estimate of .96. The Remiraz (2004) scale used in Study 4 also correlated significantly with the Hochwarter, Ferris, Zinko et al. scale ($r = .85$, $p < .001$) and with the Jarvenpaa et al. measure ($r = .67$, $p < .001$). A coefficient α reliability estimate of .93 showed this scale to have adequate reliability. The level of convergent validity reflected for the Study 3 and Remiraz (2004) reputation scales (i.e., in light of their strong, significant relationships with the more well-established scales developed by Hochwarter et al. and Jarvenpaa et al.) is sufficiently high to provide confidence that these two scales representatively sample from the construct domain of content we call ‘reputation.’

To assess the response consistency between the “self” and two “other” reports, we used a procedure outlined by James, Demaree, and Wolfe (1993), employing intra-class correlation coefficients. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Judge & Bono, 2000), a .70 or greater level of agreement was used to determine inter-rater reliability. The results suggested that a sufficient level of agreement existed between respondents and their evaluators regarding perceived reputation for the measure used in Study 3 (ICC2 = .72, $p < .001$), and for the scale used in Study 4 (ICC2 = .73, $p < .001$).

These findings suggest that both scales used in Studies 3 and 4 do, in fact, capture the latent construct of reputation as established by the current literature. Furthermore, all reputation scales were collected for two “others” as well as “self.” Therefore, these results are robust in that they examine not only how individuals see themselves, but also how others see them. These results support the Hochwarter et al. (2007b) findings in that reputation can be validly measured using either self-report or other-report methodology.

5. Study 2: Method

5.1. Sample and procedure

Data were collected as part of a larger research program on salesperson’s effectiveness. A mailing list that represents a random sample of industrial salespeople in the United States was obtained. A majority of the respondents (71%) work on business-to-business sales of components or sub assemblies (41%), capital equipment (16%), repair and maintenance (4%), and other services (10%). Of the total of 850 salespeople contacted, 145 (17%) responded and provided complete data. The response rate is comparable to other studies on industrial salespeople that used similar sampling procedures (e.g., Chakrabarty, Brown, Widing, & Taylor, 2004; Lapidus, Roberts, & Chonko, 1997).

The sample was composed of 80% male and 20% female, largely reflecting the gender composition of the group of salespeople originally contacted (which has 84% male). Approximately 92% of the participants are Caucasian, and approximately 73% are of an age between the 40 s and the 60 s. The average sales experience was 18 years, ranging from 16 months to 44.7 years. With regard to education, 63% of the respondents are college graduates, and an additional 33% had at least some college level course work. Whereas no further information beyond gender composition was available to

assess the representativeness of the sample to the population, the demographic characteristics of our sample are similar to those of the above mentioned studies on industrial salespeople, in that the respondents were well educated, highly experienced, and predominately mid-aged male.

5.2. Measures

5.2.1. Extraversion

Extraversion was selected as a personality construct, reflective of the ‘Affability’ dispositional theme proposed by Ferris et al. (in press), which predicts political skill because extraverts are social, energetic and active, which expose them to more opportunities to learn from experiences how to mostly effectively handle interpersonal situations. Extraversion was measured using 12 items from the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992). Participants responded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Substantial evidence of the construct validity has been documented (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992).

5.2.2. Political skill

Political skill was measured using the 18-item *Political Skill Inventory* developed by Ferris et al. (2005). The scale has demonstrated consistent construct validity (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005) and is widely used in political skill research (e.g., Hochwarter et al., 2007a, 2007b). A five-point scale was utilized, with item responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include “I always seem to instinctively know the right thing to say or do to influence others,” and “It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people.”

5.2.3. Job performance ratings

Job performance was measured using one item. Participants were asked to report their own job performance as compared to other salespeople in the company using a nine-point scale from 1 (*low*) to 9 (*high*).

5.2.4. Control variables

Age, gender, race, and education were included as control variables because of their potential influences on the variables of interest and the proposed relationships.

6. Study 2: Results

6.1. Zero-order correlations

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all variables are presented in Table 1, which also include the coefficient α internal consistency reliability estimates as the diagonal elements. All the variables correlated moderately and in the predicted directions.

6.2. Regression and mediation results

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 2. The results indicated that extraversion was significantly related to political skill ($\beta = .58, p < .01$), and political skill

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and intercorrelations of variables

Variables		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Study 2</i>							
1	Extraversion	3.92	.43	.78			
2	Political skill	4.20	.47	.58**	.91	7	
3	Performance	7.83	1.21	.25**	.34**	—	
<i>Study 3</i>							
1	Political skill	4.17	.54	.89			
2	Reputation	4.52	.51	.34*	.92		
3	Job performance	4.66	.59	.31*	.64**	—	
<i>Study 4</i>							
1	Proactive personality	4.85	.94	.75			
2	Political skill	5.25	.64	.38**	.85		
3	Reputation	5.59	.81	.08	.40**	.94	
4	Job performance	4.13	.61	.11	.22**	.25**	.85

Note. Listwise deletion, $N = 145$ (Study 2); $N = 53$ (Study 3); $N = 140$ (Study 3). Coefficient α internal consistency reliability estimates are the diagonal elements.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Regression results (Study 2)

Variables	Political skill		Job performance	
	β	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Age	-.01	.04	.22**	.10
Gender	.07	.08	-.02	.24
Race	.02	.06	.08	.18
Education	.01	.03	.02	.08
Extraversion	.58**	.08	.04	.29
Political skill			.31**	.25
Model <i>F</i>	$F(5, 136) = 15.06^{**}$		$F(6, 132) = 4.69^{**}$	
Adjusted R^2	.33		.14	

** $p < .01$.

was significantly related to job performance ($\beta = .31, p < .01$), controlling for the effect of extraversion. Therefore, these results support Hypotheses 1 and 2.

7. Study 3: Method

7.1. Participants and procedures

Participants are college students who participated in a summer internship program coordinated by the College of Business at a large Southeast U.S. university. Two sets of survey data were collected. A hundred and ten participants reported their demographic information and political skill in the first survey, which was conducted shortly before the beginning of their internships.

The second set of data came from an online survey completed by the supervisors of the participants immediately after the completion of the internships. The supervisors reported their perceived reputation of the interns. Ninety-two supervisors completed the second round survey, representing a response rate of 84%. Among the 92 interns whose supervisor participated in the survey, 53 of them have supervisor-evaluated performance records available from an archive kept by the internship program coordinator of the university. This results in a final sample size of 53. All participants were business majors, and 67% were female, 56% were Caucasian, 25% were Hispanic, 9% were Asian American, and 8% were African American. All the participants were in their early 20 s, with an average GPA of 3.43.

7.2. Measures

7.2.1. Political skill

Political skill was measured using the 18-item Ferris et al. (2005) *Political Skill Inventory* used in Study 2.

7.2.2. Reputation

A seven-item scale was created for this study to measure reputation. As discussed earlier, the measure was developed based on Ferris et al. (2003) for the particular context of an internship, and steps were taken to assess its construct validity. Supervisors reported their perceived reputation of the interns. A sample item is “Most people in my unit trusted and respected him/her as a co-worker.”

7.2.3. Job performance ratings

Job performance was measured using a single item rating of the overall performance of the interns from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*), provided by the interns’ immediate supervisors.

7.2.4. Control variables

Gender, race, GPA, and prior work experiences were included as control variables because of their potential influences on the variables of interest and the proposed relationships.

8. Study 3: Results

8.1. Zero-order correlations

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among study variables are shown in Table 1. On the diagonal are the reliability estimates of the scales. As expected, political skill was positively related to both reputation and job performance, and reputation was positively related to job performance.

8.2. Regression and mediation results

To test the mediation effect of reputation on the political skill–job performance relationship, the Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure was followed, and the results are shown in Table 3. First, political skill was significantly related to reputation ($\beta = .36, p < .01$). Second, political skill was significantly related to job performance ($\beta = .32, p < .01$). Finally, an

Table 3
Regression results (Study 3)

Variables	Reputation		Job performance			
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Gender	-.19	.15	.03	.17	.12	.14
Race	-.09	.14	-.07	.16	-.03	.13
GPA	.03	.21	.11	.24	-.09	.20
Prior work experiences	-.22	.00	-.36**	.00	-.23*	.00
Political skill	.36**	.12	.32**	.14	.12	.13
Reputation					.55**	.14
Model F	$F(5, 51) = 2.58^*$		$F(5, 47) = 3.21^*$		$F(6, 46) = 7.60^{**}$	
Adjusted R^2	.13		.18		.43	

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

examination of the coefficient for political skill in Table 3 indicates that when reputation was entered into the model, the effect of political skill became non-significant. Thus, we found a fully mediating effect for reputation on the political skill–job performance relationship.

9. Study 4: Method

9.1. Participants and procedures

We sent mail surveys to all 605 employees in a hospice in Southeast U.S., and a total of 140 (23%) people responded to the survey. The sample was primarily female (87.1%) and white (88%), with an average age of 47 years. The average work experience was 19 years. On average, the respondents had worked in their current position for 4 years. Most of the respondents were professionals (49%) and non-supervisory employee (30%), 20% were managers. To determine the representativeness of our sample, we collected population statistics on age, gender, and race. The population of 605 consisted of 86% female, 69% Caucasian, with an average age of 46. Therefore, no noticeable difference exists between the sample and population, indicating non-response bias should not a major concern.

9.2. Measures

9.2.1. Proactive personality

Proactive personality is a stable disposition to take personal initiative in a broad range of activities and situations (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Proactive personality is associated with taking initiatives towards making a difference, and it has been found to be related to the accumulation of political knowledge (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001) and network building activities (Thompson, 2005). The construct is used as an operationalization of the ‘Active Influence’ dispositional theme proposed by Ferris et al. (in press). Due to constraints on length of the survey, six of the highest-loading items from Bateman and Crant (1993), as employed by Parker (1998), were used to assess proactive personality. Parker (1998) reported a reliability estimate of .85 for this shortened version of the scale. A

seven-point response format was used (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) in this study. A sample item is “If I see something I don’t like, I fix it.”

9.2.2. Political skill

Political skill was measured using the 18-item Ferris et al. (2005) *Political Skill Inventory* used in Studies 2 and 3.

9.2.3. Reputation

Seven items created by Remiraz (2004) were adapted to assess the focal person’s self-evaluation of their own reputation at work. A seven-point scale was utilized, with item responses ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). A sample item is “My colleagues respect my personal quality.”

9.2.4. Job performance ratings

We used the job performance sub-dimension of the role-based performance scale developed by Welbourne, Johnson, & Erez (1998). The scale has four items, and a five-point response format (1 = *needs much improvement* to 5 = *excellent*) was used. Respondents were asked to rate themselves on quantity of work output, quality of work output, accuracy of work, and service provided to both external and internal contacts. Past research has reported reliability estimates ranging from .76 (Lubbersa, Loughlinb, & Zweigb, 2005), to .91 (Bauer, Erdogan, Liden, & Wayne, 2006).

10. Study 4: Results

10.1. Zero-order correlations

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among study variables are shown in Table 1, with the reliability estimates of the scales on the diagonal. As expected, proactive personality was positively related to political skill, and political skill was positively related to both reputation and job performance. Also, reputation was positively related to job performance.

10.2. Structural equation modeling results

To test the model linkages, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using LISREL 8.53. Scale values were used as single indicators for all variables because the number of items was large relative to the sample size. Measurement error in the scale values was adjusted by setting the path from the latent variable to the indicator equal to the square root of the scale reliability. The error variance was set equal to the variance of the scale value multiplied by one minus the reliability (Hayduk, 1987; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). The error variance for the measure of performance was set at 0. A covariance matrix was used as input to LISREL. Because the sample size for this analysis was 140, we performed a bootstrapping technique on the sample using AMOS 4.

Although a sample size for this analysis of 140 is acceptable with such a small number of paths (Marsh, Balla, & McDonald, 1988), we wished to ensure the stability of our variables. The bootstrapping analysis resulted in average standard errors of the bootstrapped standard error estimates (*SE-SE*) of less than .01. Furthermore, the increase in the

standard error estimates, when compared to the original estimates, was not large enough (i.e., less than .4) to suggest instability (Byrne, 2001). Therefore, the variables used in this study can be assumed to be stable.

To demonstrate mediation, it is necessary to estimate three nested structural models (Kelloway, 1998): (a) a fully mediated model, (b) a partially mediated model in which an additional path between the antecedent and the dependent variable was estimated, and (c) a non-mediated model that consists of the partially mediated model with the path from the antecedent to the mediating variable removed.

We first tested the mediating effect of reputation in the political skill–job performance relationship. Three nested models were estimated, and the results are presented in Table 4. Results of the SEM analysis indicated a good fit of the fully mediated model. All of the 3 estimated structural paths were significant. The partially mediated model also provided excellent fit to the data, but the non-mediated model reflected poor fit.

In comparing the fit of the two mediated models, the results of a chi-square difference test demonstrated that the partially mediated model does not demonstrate significantly better fit than the fully mediated model (X^2 diff (1, $N = 140$) = 2.52, *n.s.*), and the added path was not significant. Thus, the fully mediated model fit the data the best, indicating that reputation fully mediated the relationship between political skill and job performance.

11. Discussion

The present research sought to explore the dispositional antecedents of political skill in organizations, and to extend previous research on the job performance consequences of political skill by examining the important role of reputation, thus investigating theoretical linkages proposed in recent conceptualization of political skill in organizations (Ferris et al., *in press*). Four studies, reflecting four very different types of samples, were conducted, each of which focused on either one or both of the above-mentioned research purposes, and sought convergence across the proposed linkages. Study 1 investigated, and provided evidence in support of, the psychometric prosperities of the two reputation scales used in Studies 3 and 4. The results not only demonstrated the validity of the scales used, but also supported the findings of Hochwarter et al. (2007b), thus suggesting a significant relationship between self-reports and other-reports of reputation, and legitimizing the use of self-reports in this research.

Study 2 tested, and demonstrated support for, the ‘Affability’ dispositional theme (i.e., using extraversion as a personality operationalization) proposed by Ferris et al. (*in press*) as a predictor of political skill, and, in turn, political skill as a predictor of job performance ratings. In Study 3, the political skill–job performance ratings linkage, examined in Study 2, again was tested, and reputation was introduced and found to fully mediate this relationship. Study 4 investigated all the linkages examined in the first two studies, constructively replicating (Lykken, 1968) both the personality prediction of political skill (i.e., using proactive personality as an operationalization of the ‘Active Influence’ dispositional theme proposed by Ferris et al., *in press*), and reputation’s full mediation of the political skill–job performance ratings relationship. Collectively, the results demonstrated convergence in findings for, and constructive replication of, some of the proposed linkages of the Ferris et al. theoretical model of political skill. Therefore, this package of studies increases the generalizability of the results, which were similar across investigations.

Table 4
Model comparisons (Study 4)

Model description	Path loadings	NFI	CFI	GFI	RMSEA	df	χ^2	Δdf	$\Delta \chi^2$	
Full mediation	Proactive personality → Political skill	.47**	.93	.97	.98	.059	3	4.43		
	Political skill → Reputation	.44**								
	Reputation → Job performance	.29**								
Partial mediation; add path from political skill to job performance	Proactive personality → Political skill	.47**	.97	1.00	.99	.00	2	1.91	1	2.52
	Political skill → Reputation	.44**								
	Reputation → Job performance	.21*								
	Political skill → Job performance	.17								
Non-mediated model for reputation; remove path from political skill to reputation	—	.63	.62	.93	.26	2	121.33	—	—	

Note. $N = 140$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

11.1. Contributions of the research

The current research makes several contributions to the literature. First, guided by the theoretical framework proposed by Ferris and colleagues, we examined some of the dispositional antecedents of political skill, and the results provide preliminary support for the proposed theory. The exploration of political skill's antecedents not only helps to better understand the source and meaning of the political skill construct, but also provides insight for human resource management. Abilities associated with political skill are becoming increasingly important for employees to be successful, as the number of jobs that require interpersonal effectiveness, flexibility, and adaptation increase in the modern economy. Matching the dispositional traits and their manifested abilities with job types might be conducive to both more satisfied workers and more effective organizations.

Further, we examined the job performance consequences of political skill, and replicated prior findings in several different contexts. We also were able to explore the nature of, and process involved in, the relationship by examining the mediating role of reputation. It appears that the ability to build a favorable reputation at work explains to a great degree the positive influence of political skill on job performance, confirming prior notions that job performance can be at least partially a function of social construction. It also suggests that whereas direct efforts are made by politically skilled individuals for interpersonal influence purposes, the targets or audience, the organizational context, and social norms also serve as a backdrop for such influence attempts to potentially become more effective. Future research needs to look further into this process so as to better understand the paths toward interpersonal influence of political skill in organizations.

11.2. Limitations and strengths of the research

We acknowledge a number of limitations of this research. First, although we tested the dispositional theme–political skill link as proposed by Ferris et al. (in press), we did not include in our studies all dispositional themes and personality variable operationalizations considered as being potential antecedents of political skill. Future research investigating the impact of the other two dispositional themes (i.e., 'Perceptiveness' and 'Control') will further our understanding of the dispositional foundations or antecedents of political skill. Also, future research should include multiple dispositional themes in the same study in order to assess the extent to which each theme accounts for unique variance in political skill.

Second, the use of self-report measures for job performance and reputation is an issue of concern for Studies 2 and 4, as is the relatively low response rate, which limits generalizability. Whereas self-evaluated job performance and reputation may well reflect the reality, and sometimes even do so to a better degree (e.g., when raters are not familiar with the individuals being evaluated), issues such as levels of self-awareness and social desirability may come into play and obscure the true relationships being examined. The fact that Study 3, which used supervisor-rated job performance, replicated results in Study 2 on the relationship between political skill and job performance, adds to the confidence for the validity of this particular effect.

In addition, Study 1 also provided evidence that self-report reputation measures can be effectively used to reflect the individuals' reputation as perceived by others. Further, the consistency of results regarding the mediating role of reputation in Studies 3 and 4 also provides support for the argument that findings in Study 4 are less likely to be artificial.

However, we do acknowledge that Study 3 has a small sample size, which gives rise to issues such as generalizability. Further, the use of single-item measures of job performance in Studies 2 and 3 also is a limitation.

Without the additional evidence presented in other studies that converge to show the validity of the findings in individual studies, the above-mentioned limitations may present serious weaknesses. However, we believe the set of studies were able to compensate to a certain degree for the weakness of the design in each individual study, and together illustrate an informative and convincing picture about the true relationships among personality, political skill reputation, and job performance. Given the above limitations of the current research, we encourage future research to fully examine the relationships between dispositional constructs and political skill in the way prescribed by theory posited by Ferris and colleagues, and to further explore the relationships proposed in this research and the extensions of them using more fine-grained measures of job performance, and data from multiple sources.

Despite the limitations, a significant strength of the present research needs to be highlighted. The proposed linkages among personality, political skill, reputation, and job performance ratings were tested across studies in different contexts, and with different measures of the personality, reputation, and job performance constructs. It is worthy of mention that using self-report and other-report measures of reputation and job performance yield similar results on relationships between personality and job performance, as well as the mediating role of reputation. Findings on the relationship between personality and political skill also consistently supported existing theories in this area. As such, the convergent results for the obtained relationships across studies contribute considerable confidence to the validity of the findings through the establishment of “constructive replication” (Lykken, 1968).

11.3. Directions for future research

Initial research on political skill has demonstrated this construct to be a critical factor for individual performance, interpersonal influence, stress reduction, and career success. Further, more research is needed to understand the mechanisms through which political skill influences intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes, with specific reference to tests of additional linkage in the conceptualization proposed by Ferris et al. (in press). The present research indicated that reputation derived from one’s political skill determines, to a great degree, individuals’ work effectiveness. The role of other related factors within the social context, such as perceived sincerity and trust, the size and quality of one’s social network, and so forth, in the political skill–work outcomes relationships are worth further exploration in order to better understand the mechanisms through which political skill demonstrates its effects. Such efforts would provide tests of other linkages in, and even potentially expand upon, the theoretical model proposed by Ferris et al. (in press).

The nature and development of reputation is worth scholarly attention in its own right. In order to make meaningful advancements in our understanding of reputation and the roles it plays in the organizational sciences, systematic theoretical and methodological efforts are needed to develop a more informed understanding of its construct domain. The measures of reputation used in this research reflect reasonably adequate measures of general reputation at work. However, after the reputation construct is subjected to additional scrutiny, it might be found to be multidimensional, with differential antecedents and consequences. If so, an appropriate scale would need to be developed that captured the full extent of the reputation construct domain.

12. Conclusion

In conclusion, these studies and findings represent the initial steps toward developing a program of research examining antecedents of political skill, and the role of political skill and reputation in job performance. We hope the present investigation stimulates further research by scholars on the roles of political skill and reputation in the organizational sciences.

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